



Ian J. Whitmore

ARTIST IAN J. WHITMORE KNOWS “NOWHERE” QUITE WELL. Growing up in Lincoln, Nebraska, where he also completed his undergraduate degree, and then moving to Bloomington, Indiana for an MFA in photography, the Midwesterner can quickly spot the

public, commercial landscape of malls, industrial parks and corporate offices that feel eerily familiar yet completely void of meaning. In his solo exhibition, “Nowhere” at Johalla Projects, he explores the ubiquitous nature of those spaces emptied of meaning. His solo exhibition coincides with the unveiling of his photographs at the Damen Blue Line stop in Chicago’s Wicker Park area, which in and of itself is a “nowhere” space—a portal that people move through on a regular basis, yet forget even exists outside of the utilitarian function it serves.

Taking the name of this project from two books by James Howard Kunstler—“The Geography of Nowhere” and “Home from Nowhere”—Whitmore uses these concepts as the premise of his everyman, everyday explorations. His work has tinges of Chris Ware’s sullenness as seen through the urban landscape and sprawl, yet Whitmore attempts to extrapolate something more from this modern-day American cultural production. “The premise of this project is, I’m not a designer or an architect, I’m just someone who has to live with this shit, and it’s not right,” says Whitmore.

The project also takes on an artist book dimension—“Onomasticon” is an ongoing photography project that looks at these nowhere, non-place spaces. Each book is named after a nowhere-word and coincides with a letter of the alphabet, making for twenty-six books total in this series. “Bedizen,” for example, is a verb meaning “to dress or adorn in a showy, gaudy, or tasteless manner”; the artist-book folds out, displaying similar variations on the theme of that giant metal power generator box that just pops up in parking lots, between shrubs, on a bed of artificially pink rocks, and so on.

Photographs in the exhibition do not have names other than “Nowhere” and an assigned number, which coincides with a photographic negative. There is a large-scale photograph of a cold marble corridor with a single plant at the end of it. There’s an array of bushes planted meaninglessly in a grassy field. Then we find the sunset bus image: a white bus with a pink, purple, yellow and orange sunset painted onto its side is parked on a bed of white rocks. The back of the bus hovers over green shrubbery that seems completely out of place. This photograph stands out against the others, offering an artificial landscape that throws off the normally drab color tone.

“These spaces affect everything we do, and how we interact with one another,” says Whitmore. “I look at these spaces for what they are, and I want people to think a bit more about them as they pass through every day.”

(Alicia Eler)

Ian J. Whitmore shows through December 1 at Johalla Projects, 1821 West Hubbard, Suite 209